

The **Sultan Ahmed Mosque** (Turkish: Sultanahmet Camii) is a historical mosque in Istanbul, the largest city in Turkey and the capital of the Ottoman Empire (from 1453 to 1923). The mosque is popularly known as the **Blue Mosque** for the blue tiles adorning the walls of its interior.

It was built between 1609 and 1616, during the rule of Ahmed I. Like many other mosques, it also comprises a tomb of the founder, a madrasah and a hospice. While still used as a mosque, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque has also become a popular tourist attraction.

*History:* After the Peace of Zsitvatorok and the unfavourable result of the wars with Persia, Sultan Ahmed I decided to build a large mosque in Istanbul as recompense. This would be the first imperial mosque to be built in more than forty years. Whereas his predecessors had paid for their mosques with their war booty, Sultan Ahmed I had to withdraw the funds from the treasury, because he had not won any notable victories. This provoked the anger of the ulema, the Muslim legal scholars.



The mosque was to be built on the site of the palace of the Byzantine emperors, facing the Hagia Sophia (at that time the most venerated mosque in Istanbul) and the hippodrome, a site of great symbolic significance. Large parts of the southern side of the mosque rest on the foundation and vaults of the Great Palace. Several palaces had already been built there, most notably the palace of Sokollu Mehmet Paşa, so these first had to be bought at a considerable cost and pulled down.

*Large parts of the Sphendone (curved tribune with U-shaped structure of the hippodrome) were also removed to make room for the new mosque.*

*Construction of the mosque started in August 1609 when the sultan himself came to break the first sod. It was his intention that this would become the first mosque of his empire. He appointed his royal architect Sedefkar Mehmet Ağa, a pupil and senior assistant of the famous architect Mimar Sinan to be in charge of the construction. The organization of the work was described in meticulous detail in eight volumes, now found in the library of the Topkapı Palace. The opening ceremonies were held in 1617 (although the inscription on the gate of the mosque says 1616).*

*The sultan could now pray in the royal box (hünkâr mahfil). The building was not yet finished in this last year of his reign, as the last accounts were signed by his successor Mustafa I.*

*Known as the Blue Mosque, Sultan Ahmed Mosque is one of the most impressive monuments in the world.*

*The **Basilica Cistern** (Turkish: **Yerebatan Sarayı** - "Sunken Palace", or **Yerebatan Sarnıcı** - "Sunken Cistern"), is the largest of several hundred ancient cisterns that lie beneath the city of Istanbul.*



*The cistern, located 500 feet (150 m) southwest of the Hagia Sophia on the historical peninsula of Sarayburnu, was built in the 6th century during the reign of Byzantine Emperor Justinian I.*

*The name of this subterranean structure derives from a large public square on the First Hill of Constantinople, the Stoa Basilica, beneath which it was originally constructed. Before being*



*converted to a cistern, a great Basilica stood in its place, built between the 3rd and 4th centuries during the Early Roman Age as a commercial, legal and artistic center.*

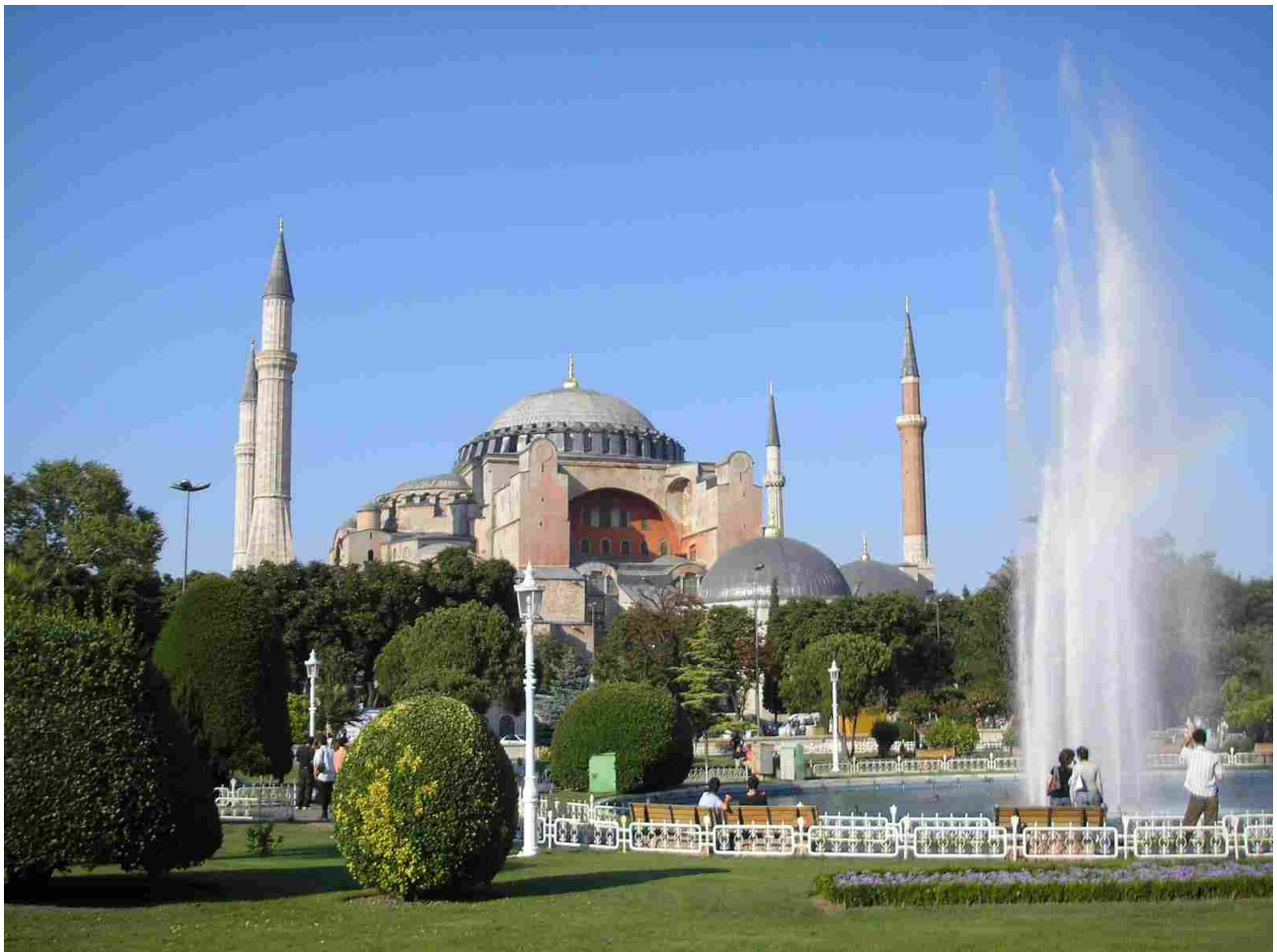
*The basilica was reconstructed by Ilius after a fire in 476.*

*Ancient texts indicated that the basilica contained gardens, surrounded by a colonnade and facing Hagia Sophia. According to ancient historians, Emperor Constantine constructed a structure which was later rebuilt and enlarged by Emperor Justinian after the Nika riots of 532, which devastated the city.*

*Historical texts claim that 7,000 slaves were involved in the construction of the cistern.*

*The enlarged cistern provided a water filtration system for the Great Palace of Constantinople and other buildings on the First Hill, and continued to provide water to the Topkapi Palace after the Ottoman conquest in 1453 and into modern times.*

**Hagia Sophia** ("Holy Wisdom"; Latin: *Sancta Sophia* or *Sancta Sapiencia*; Turkish: *Aya Sofya*) is a former Orthodox patriarchal basilica, later a mosque, and now a museum in Istanbul, Turkey. From the date of its dedication in 360 until 1453, it served as the cathedral of Constantinople, except between 1204 and 1261, when it was converted to a Roman Catholic cathedral under the Latin Patriarch of Constantinople of the Western Crusader established Latin Empire.



*The building was a mosque from 29 May 1453 until 1934, when it was secularized. It was opened as a museum on 1 February 1935.*

*The Church was dedicated to the Logos, the second person of the Holy Trinity, its dedication feast taking place on December 25, the anniversary of the incarnation of the Logos in Christ. Although it is sometimes referred to as Sancta Sophia (as though it were named after Saint Sophia), sophia is the phonetic spelling in Latin of the Greek word for wisdom - the full name in Greek "Church of the Holy Wisdom of God".*

*Famous in particular for its massive dome, it is considered the epitome of Byzantine architecture and is said to have "changed the history of architecture". It was the largest cathedral in the world for nearly a thousand years, until Seville Cathedral was completed in 1520. The current building was originally constructed as a church between 532 and 537 on the orders of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian and was the third Church of the Holy Wisdom to occupy the site, the previous two having both been destroyed by rioters. It was designed by Isidore of Miletus, a physicist, and Anthemius of Tralles, a mathematician.*

*The first church was known as the Megálē Ekklesiā, "Great Church", or in Latin "Magna Ecclesia", because of its larger dimensions in comparison to the contemporary churches in the City. Inaugurated on 15 February 360 (during the reign of Constantius II) by the arian bishop Eudoxius of Antioch, it was built next to the area where the imperial palace was being developed. The nearby Hagia Eirene ("Holy Peace") church was completed earlier and served as cathedral until the Hagia Sophia was completed. Both churches acted together as the principal churches of the Byzantine Empire.*

*A second church was ordered by Theodosius II, who inaugurated it on 10 October 415. The basilica with a wooden roof was built by architect Rufinus. A fire started during the tumult of the Nika Revolt burned the second Hagia Sophia to the ground on 13–14 January 532.*

***Third church (current structure):*** *On 23 February 532, only a few days after the destruction of the second basilica, Emperor Justinian I elected to build a third and entirely different basilica, larger and more majestic than its predecessors.*

*Hagia Sophia was the seat of the Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople and a principal setting for Byzantine imperial ceremonies, such as coronations. The basilica also offered asylum to wrongdoers.*

*Earthquakes in August 553 and on 14 December 557 caused cracks in the main dome and eastern half-dome. The main dome collapsed completely during a subsequent earthquake on 7 May 558.*

*After the great earthquake of 25 October 989, which ruined the great dome, the Byzantine emperor Basil II asked for the Armenian architect Trdat, creator of the great churches of Ani and Argina, to repair the dome. His main repairs were to the western arch and a portion of the dome. The extent of the damage required six years of repair and reconstruction; the church was re-opened on 13 May 994.*

*In his book *De caerimoniis aulae Byzantinae* ("Book of Ceremonies"), Emperor Constantine VII (913–919) wrote a detailed account of the ceremonies held in the Hagia Sophia by the emperor and the patriarch.*

*To cut a long story short, it was restored so many times after so many disasters and fires during the history.*

*In 1453 Sultan Mehmed laid siege to Constantinople, driven in part by a desire to convert the city to Islam. Immediately after the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople in 1453, the Hagia Sophia was converted into the Ayasofya Mosque.*

*The most famous restoration of the Hagia Sophia was ordered by Sultan Abdülmecid and completed by eight hundred workers between 1847 and 1849, under the supervision of the Swiss-Italian architect brothers Gaspare and Giuseppe Fossati.*

*The brothers consolidated the dome and vaults, straightened the columns, and revised the decoration of the exterior and the interior of the building. The mosaics in the upper gallery were cleaned. The old chandeliers were replaced by new pendant ones. New gigantic circular-framed disks or medallions were hung on columns. They were inscribed with the names of Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, the first four caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali, and the two grandchildren of Mohammed: Hassan and Hussain, by the calligrapher Kazasker İzzet Effendi (1801–1877).*

*In 1850 the architect Fossati built a new sultan's gallery in a Neo-Byzantine style connected to the royal pavilion behind the mosque. Outside the Hagia Sophia, a timekeeper's building and a new madrasah were built. The minarets were altered so that they were of equal height. When the restoration was finished, the mosque was re-opened with ceremonial pomp on 13 July 1849.*

*In 1935, the first Turkish President and founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, transformed the building into a museum. The carpets were removed and the marble floor decorations appeared for the first time in centuries, while the white plaster covering many of the mosaics was painstakingly removed by expert restorers. Use of the complex as a place of worship (mosque or church) is strictly prohibited.*

*The **Caferağa Medresesi** is a former medresesi, located in Istanbul, Turkey, next to the Hagia Sophia. It was built in 1559 by Mimar Sinan by orders of Cafer Agha, a eunuch during the reign of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566). The medresesi, listed within the independent medresesi and having had a number of restorations until today, was changed by the Turkish Cultural Service Foundation in 1989 into a touristic centre with 15 classrooms/exhibition rooms, a big salon and a garden where traditional Turkish handicrafts such as calligraphy, ceramics, jewelry and so forth are taught, made and sold.*



*The medresesi is located very close to the Hagia Sophia, stairs lead down to it from the small street. The structure is entered through the main gate which leads into the inner courtyard, around which the former learning rooms are located. There is a restaurant inside that offers a variety of Turkish dishes.*

*The word madrasah is derived from the triconsonantal Semitic root D-R-S 'to learn, study'. Therefore, madrasah literally means 'a place where learning and studying are done'. The word is also present as a loanword with the same innocuous meaning in many Arabic-influenced languages, such as: Urdu, Bengali, Hindi, Persian, Turkish, Azeri, Indonesian, Malay and Bosnian. In the Arabic language, the word madrasah simply means the same as school does in the English language, whether that is private, public or parochial school, as well as for any primary or secondary school whether Muslim, non-Muslim, or secular. Unlike the understanding of the word school in British English, the word madrasah is like the term school in American English, in that it can refer to a university-level or post-graduate school as well.*

***Khoca Mimar Sinan Ağa (Mimar Sinan) (1490 - 1588)***



*He was the chief Ottoman architect and civil engineer for sultans Suleiman I, Selim II, and Murad III. He was responsible for the construction of more than three hundred major structures, and other more modest projects, such as his Koran schools (sibyan mektebs).*

*Trained as a military engineer, he rose through the ranks to become first an officer and finally a Janissary commander, with the honorific title of ağa. He learned his architectural and engineering skills while on campaign with the Janissaries, becoming expert at constructing fortifications of all kinds, as well as military infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and aqueducts.*



*At about the age of fifty, he was appointed as chief royal architect, applying the technical skills he had acquired in the army to the "creation of fine religious buildings" and civic structures of all kinds. He remained in post for almost fifty years.*

*His masterpiece is the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne, although his most famous work is the Suleiman Mosque in Istanbul. He headed an extensive governmental department and trained many assistants who, in turn, distinguished themselves, including Sedefkar Mehmet Ağa, architect of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque.*

*He is considered the greatest architect of the classical period of Ottoman architecture, and has been compared to Michelangelo, his contemporary in the West. Michelangelo and his plans for St. Peter's Basilica in Rome were well-known in Istanbul, since Leonardo da Vinci and he had been invited, in 1502 and 1505 respectively, by the Sublime Porte to submit plans for a bridge spanning the Golden Horn.*

***Hagia Irene** or **Hagia Eirene** ("Holy Peace", Turkish: *Aya İrini*), often erroneously rendered in English as **St Irene**, is a former Eastern Orthodox church located in the outer courtyard of Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, Turkey. It is open as a museum every day except Monday but requires special permission for admission.*



*The building reputedly stands on the site of a pre-Christian temple. It ranks, in fact, as the first church built in Constantinople. Roman emperor Constantine I commissioned the first Hagia Irene*

church in the 4th century. From May to July 381 the First Council of Constantinople took place in the church. It was burned down during the Nike revolt in 532. Emperor Justinian I had the church restored in 548. It served as the church of the Patriarchate before Hagia Sophia was completed in 537.

Heavily damaged by an earthquake in the 8th century, it dates in its present form largely from the repairs made at that time. The Emperor Constantine V ordered the restorations and had its interior decorated with mosaics and frescoes. Hagia Irene is the only example of a Byzantine church in the city which retains its original atrium. A great cross in the half-dome above the main narthex, where the image of the Pantocrator or Theotokos was usually placed in Byzantine tradition, is a unique vestige of the Iconoclastic art; presumably it replaced earlier decoration. The church was enlarged during the 11th and 12th centuries.

After the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by Mehmed II, the church was enclosed inside the walls of the Topkapi palace. The Janissaries used the church as an armoury. It was also used as a warehouse for war booty. During the reign of Sultan Ahmet III (1703–1730) it was converted into a weapons museum.

It was repaired by Field Marshal Ahmed Fethi Paşa in 1846 and became the first Turkish museum. It was used as the Military Museum from 1908 until 1978 when it was turned over to the Turkish Ministry of Culture.

Today, the museum serves mainly as a concert hall for classical music performances, due to its extraordinary acoustic characteristics and impressive atmosphere. Many of the concerts of the Istanbul International Music Festival have been held here every summer since 1980.

In 2000, the Turkish haute couture designer Faruk Saraç produced a special show here. A collection of 700 designed pieces inspired by the Ottoman sultans, including the robes of 36 sultans ranging from Osman Gazi, the founder of the Ottoman Empire to the last sultan, Mehmed VI, were on display. The show was accompanied by music and the story of the sultans' lives and demonstrations of Ottoman-era dancing.

The **Topkapi Palace** (Turkish: Topkapı Sarayı) is a palace in Istanbul, Turkey, which was the official and primary residence in the city of the Ottoman Sultans for approximately 400 years (1465-1856) of their 624-year reign. The palace was a setting for state occasions and royal entertainments and is a major tourist attraction today, containing the most holy relics of the Muslim world such as the Prophet Muhammed's cloak and sword. Topkapi Palace is among those monuments belonging to the "Historic Areas of Istanbul", which became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985, and is described in Criterion iv as "the best example[s] of ensembles of palaces [...] of the Ottoman period."





*Initial construction began in 1459, ordered by Sultan Mehmed II, the conqueror of Byzantine Constantinople. The palace is a complex made up of four main courtyards and many smaller buildings. At the height of its existence as a royal residence, the palace was home to as many as 4,000 people, formerly covering a larger area with a long shoreline. The complex has been expanded over the centuries, with many renovations such as after the 1509 earthquake and 1665 fire. It held mosques, a hospital, bakeries, and a mint. The name directly translates as "Cannon gate Palace", from the palace being named after a nearby, now destroyed, gate.*

*Topkapı Palace gradually lost its importance at the end of the 17th century, as the Sultans preferred to spend more time in their new palaces along the Bosphorus. In 1856, Sultan Abdül Mecid I decided to move the court to the newly built Dolmabahçe Palace, the first European-style palace in the city. Some functions, such as the imperial treasury, the library, mosque and mint, were retained though.*

*After the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1921, Topkapı Palace was transformed by government decree on April 3, 1924 into a museum of the imperial era. The Topkapı Palace Museum is under the administration of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The palace complex has hundreds of rooms and chambers, but only the most important are accessible to the public today. The complex is guarded by officials of the ministry as well as armed guards of the Turkish military. The palace is full of examples of Ottoman architecture and also contains large collections of porcelain, robes, weapons, shields, armor, Ottoman miniatures, Islamic calligraphic manuscripts and murals, as well as a display of Ottoman treasure and jewelry.*

*The southern and western sides border the large former imperial flower park, today Gülhane Park. Surrounding the palace compound on the southern and eastern side is the Sea of Marmara. Various related buildings such as small summer palaces (kasrı), pavilions, kiosks (köşkü) and other structures for royal pleasures and functions formerly existed at the shore in an area known as the Fifth Place, but have disappeared over time due to neglect and the construction of the shoreline railroad in the 19th century. The last remaining seashore structure that still exists today is the Basketmakers' Kiosk, constructed in 1592 by Sultan Murad III. The total area of Topkapı Palace*

*was in fact much larger than what it is today.*

**Fatih** (English: Conqueror) is a municipality (belediye) in Istanbul, Turkey that encompasses most of the peninsula coinciding with historic Constantinople. Until 2009, the district of Eminönü, formerly a separate municipality located at the tip of the peninsula, was merged into Fatih. Fatih borders the Golden Horn to the north and the Sea of Marmara to the south, while the Western border is demarked by the Theodosian wall.

The name "Fatih" comes from the Ottoman emperor Fatih Sultan Mehmed (Mehmed the Conqueror), and means "Conqueror" in Turkish, originally from Arabic. The Fatih Mosque built by Mehmed II is in this district, while his resting place is next to the mosque and is much visited. It was on the ruins of the Church of the Holy Apostles, destroyed by earthquakes and years of war, that the Fatih Mosque was built, and around the mosque a large prayer school.

Immediately after the conquest, groups of Islamic scholars transformed the major churches of Hagia Sophia and the Pantocrator (today the Zeyrek Mosque) into mosques, but the Fatih Mosque and its surrounding complex was the first purpose-built Islamic seminary within the city walls. The building of the mosque complex ensured that the area continued to thrive beyond the conquest; markets grew up to support the thousands of workers involved in the building and to supply them with materials, and then to service the students in the seminary. The area quickly became a Turkish neighbourhood with a particularly pious character due to the seminary. Some of this piety has endured until today.



From the 18th century onwards Istanbul started to grow outside the walls, and then began the transformation of Fatih into the mass of concrete apartment buildings that we have today. This process has been accelerated over the years by fires which destroyed whole neighbourhoods of wooden houses, and a major earthquake in 1766, which destroyed the Fatih Mosque and many of the surrounding buildings, (which were subsequently rebuilt). Fires continued to ravage the old city, and the wide roads that run through the area today are a legacy of all that burning.

*There are few wooden buildings left in Fatih today, although right up until the 1960s the area was covered with narrow streets of wooden buildings. Nowadays, the district is largely made up of narrow streets with tightly-packed 5- or 6-floor apartment buildings.*

*On the other hand, today Fatih is known as one of the most conservative areas of Istanbul because of the religious residents of the Çarşamba quarter which is essentially a very minor part of this historical district. Çarşamba is famous with bearded men in heavy coats, the traditional baggy 'shalwar' trousers and Islamic turban; while women dressed in full black gowns are a common sight as this area is popular with members of the Naqshbandi Sufi order affiliated to a Sheikh.*

*Conservative parties always do well in this area.*

